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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
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RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6805
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4530
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3154
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7674
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1751
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5085
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1291
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INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7416

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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Palestinian Territories, Syria/Iran, Asad/ Referendum,
Iraq, Rice, Syria/US (5/17)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on May 17 featured an official Syrian statement issued on May 16 expressing Syria's deep concern about the bloody clashes among Palestinians in Gaza. "Fighting among Palestinians comes at a time when they must close ranks and boost national unity in the framework of the Mecca Accord in order to confront the expansionist Israeli occupation which continues to swallow Palestinian lands, above all, Jerusalem," the official statement noted. It added, "Syria calls for an immediate cease-fire among Palestinians to prevent bloodshed and bury sedition, in order to maintain the centrality of the Palestinian issue in Arab and international public opinion."

Papers also reported Foreign Minister Mouallem's meeting on May 16 with Iranian FM Mottaki on the sidelines of the meeting of the Organization of Islamic Conference in Islamabad. Talks focused on bilateral relations and the latest developments in the occupied Palestinian territories. Talks also reiterated the importance of intensifying efforts to achieve national reconciliation in Iraq and to establish a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops.

On Syrian-Russian relations, papers cited a statement in Moscow on May 16, by Yevgeny Primakov, Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Russia, describing President Asad as a prominent political leader with a deep strategic vision in dealing with regional issues and international relations. Primakov, a former Russian PM, said, "Recent events have proven that President Asad was defending Syria's interests and seeking to boost the country's role in the region." On Middle East issues, he called on Israel to implement the requirements of the Arab peace initiative, especially the land-for-peace principle, which means, for Syria, restoration of the occupied Golan. Primakov added that Syrian-Russian relations are progressing in all domains, particularly in the economic field.

Syrian papers continued to publish reports, articles, and interviews showing support for President Asad and highlighting Syria's achievements under his rule in anticipation of the forthcoming public referendum on his nomination for a new 7-year term in office.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Foreign Minister Mouallem discusses bilateral relations and latest developments in the occupied Palestinian territories with Iranian FM Mottaki" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/17)

"FM Mouallem and Iranian FM Mottaki reiterate the necessity for continuing consultation and coordination between the two friendly countries to realize security and stability in the region" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/16)

"Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Russia, Yevgeny Primakov: President Asad is the best political leader in defending Syria's interests" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/17)

"Syrian Official Source: Syria watches with deep concern the bloody clashes among the Palestinian brothers in Gaza. The source calls on Palestinians to adopt the language of dialogue and reason" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/17)

"Ceasefire in reached between Fatah and Hamas. 14 Palestinians killed in Gaza yesterday. Damascus calls for immediate ceasefire; the world community denounces infighting" (Independent al-Watan, 5/17)

"The visit to Beirut by US Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, David Welch, unveils reality of American intervention" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/17)

"An Israeli draft resolution at the Knesset calling for a popular referendum on any decision on withdrawal from the Golan" (Independent al-Watan, 5/17)

"Violence reaps the lives of 80 Iraqis. Iraq rejects an Islamic peace-keeping force" (Independent al-Watan, 5/17)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Referendum, Dedication of Nationalism"

Dr. Sa'id Musallam, a columnist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (5/17): "The referendum on Al-Asad's new term acquires exceptional importance this time because it represents the major strategic option of Syria and the region...."

"Al-Asad is the guarantee of stability, security, and calm for Syria's generations in the present and the future.... Al-Asad has confronted with a great deal of wisdom and ability the attempts to bring Syria to its knees."

"'Yes' to Al-Asad means yes to national sovereignty, national unity, and adherence to the resistance option and the liberation of the occupied territories...."

"Constancy in a Variable World"

Isam Dari, Chief Editor of government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/17): "Despite all the international storms and changes that have driven even superpowers to submit fully or partially to the will of the United States, Syria, thanks to a farsighted political vision, has managed to overcome the ordeals and crises at minimal loss and without budging an iota from its positions, policies, and national and pan-Arab principles, which were the reason behind all those pressures, threats, accusations, sanctions, and attempts to isolate it...."

"Syria today is stronger and more secure and stable.... Attempts to isolate Syria have failed and the world is now reopening doors of dialogue with Damascus in light of its status, role, and weight as

an important regional country that cannot be ignored....

"Syria has achieved all this thanks to its national unity, its rational, objective, and farsighted political decisions, and the cohesion between the popular base and the enlightened political leadership represented by President Asad...."

"Between Two Projects"

Khalid al-Ashhab, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (5/17): "Syria's confrontation of the American campaign against it and the region in the past few years was balanced and patient.... Syria, in this confrontation, remained committed to national and pan-Arab principles and sought to create a deep and effective crack in the American plan through resistance and by depriving the American occupation of stability and a sense of security...."

"In Iraq, the American military and human bleeding have increased despite all the successive security plans, convincing the Americans that their plan there is definitely losing. In Lebanon, the valiant resistance succeeded in dispelling the aspects and pictures of the American and Israeli military superiority, and indeed in defeating the entire plan, not only obstructing it...."

"Today, the American plan publicly continues its retreat in the Arab region and even inside the United States politically and ideologically, while Syria continues to score successes and dismantle the structures of the American-Zionist siege around it...."

"The Arab Initiative is the Bottom Line for Negotiations"

Dr. Mahdi Dakhlallah, former Information Minister, commented in Tishreen(5/17): "It is surprising that Arabs, who offered a peace initiative that included the minimum Arab demands and rights, now appear willing to negotiate this plan with Israel...."

"Negotiations mean offering concessions. We wonder if Arabs are willing to go below the level of their peace initiative.... It is dangerous to relinquish the Palestinian right of return, for example...."

"It is strange that some Arabs are more Americanized than Americans and are willing to offer more concessions than what Israel itself can ask for...."

"We wonder where ignorance will lead Arabs."

"Rice in Moscow: an Impossible Mission"

Hanan Hamad, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/17): "US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's mission in Moscow is not at all easy in light of President Putin's recent anti-American positions and statements...."

"Washington does not have the ability to pressure Moscow, as it now needs Russia's support with regard to the Iranian nuclear file and other issues in the Security Council...."

Corbin